

PART SEVEN

THE FINDS FROM THE FUTA PASS TO THE RIVER SIEVE (1993-1998)

INTRODUCTION TO PART SEVEN

The results achieved thanks to the finds from 1979 to 1992 on the 21 km long stretch of ridge between mount Venere and the Futa pass amply rewarded all our efforts.

The widespread acknowledgement we received (as well as some criticism), motivated us to continue our search (in the beginning judged impossible by many) even though the task was very demanding due to the multitude of difficulties involved.

The echoes of the first finds aroused the awareness of the Municipalities of Firenzuola and S. Benedetto Val di Sambro. In September 1989, with the scientific support of the University of Bologna, the Municipalities organised a national conference¹ to make the finds known and take an in-depth look at various aspects in terms of the many structures the transapennine road system has assumed during the ages.

We also held other conferences in various circumstances that contributed towards letting people know about our archaeological adventure. Many people were enthralled by our discoveries and this common interest helped us to forge numerous friendships. We remember with pleasure the new acquaintance and happy friendship established in 1987 with a number of young people from Bruscoli² who were so excited to learn that the remains of such an ancient transapennine road system passed through their area. In November 1989 we established with them and other friends from Bologna, the “Bruscoli Archaeological Group” with the aim of joining forces to extend explorations and to safeguard

the finds. We also wanted to constitute a legal organisation and obtain official recognition as such from the Archaeological Superintendency³.

The voluntary association proved to be very useful and active and it often received the formal praise of the Superintendency. One of the most important results achieved was without doubt the unearthing of stretches of paving south of the Futa pass.

When in 1989 we published our first book, we had already achieved our objective to find the remains of the paving as far as the Futa pass, demonstrate the continuity of the road as far as the pass and its transapennine role. We should have been satisfied with the results we had achieved, especially considering that during the conference in the autumn of 1989, we received substantial recognition of the Roman origins of the road; its date of construction was the only topic still under discussion.

We could have finished our search, limiting ourselves to carrying out activities to safeguard and enhance the finds. However, as often occurs with man’s endeavours, we were not content yet; we wanted to extend the search both north of mount Bastione⁴, and south of the Futa pass, in the more mountainous area. This was because there was no hope of finding any testimonies of the Roman road in the mid and lower Mugello valley due to the frequency with which this area was used in the Middle Ages.

¹ The conference was held on 28-29-30 September and 1 October 1989 and its theme was “La viabilità tra Bologna e Firenze nel tempo - problemi generali e nuove acquisizioni”. [The road system between Bologna and Florence in history – general problems and new acquisitions]. Further information about the conference can be found in the appendix.

² Bruscoli is a large village in the Municipality of Firenzuola, on the western side of the ridge used by the Roman road, near Piana degli Ossi - Passeggere, and the border between Tuscany and Emilia.

³ In the appendix, there is a summary of the main activities carried out by the “Bruscoli Archaeological Group”.

⁴ Please refer to chapters XV and XVI for our explorations north of mount Bastione.

Furthermore, historic sources indicated various routes through the Mugello valley, nearly all of which converged at the Futa pass. Therefore, we thought it was reasonable to concentrate the search within a radius relatively close to the Futa pass, in the hope of intercepting the route (it was very probably the only route near the pass).

When deciding on which area to explore, we always bore in mind that the route must have pointed towards Fiesole, discarding other theoretically feasible routes that contrasted with the Roman principles of straightness and convenience. We also had to study the orography of the area south of the pass, which must have certainly influenced the choice of the best route. By simply observing the ridges, we were able to discern which turned out to be the correct one.

Two ridges leave the Futa pass that could have been used for the route to Fiesole. One heads east and ascends from the 903 metre altitude of the Futa pass up to the 1,125 metres on top of mount Gazzaro, it then re-descends to the Osteria Bruciata

pass at an altitude of 917; here, it abandons the Apennine ridge and heads south, remaining at a high altitude as far as mount Linari (876 metres); from here it starts to descend to S. Piero in Sieve (205 metres) passing through S. Agata di Mugello. Along this itinerary from the Futa pass, it is necessary to ascend 222 metres and then descend 207 metres and then maintain the altitude of 800-900 metres as far as mount Linari; therefore, it is necessary to overcome a 432-metre difference in levels and remain at an altitude of about 850 metres above sea level for 11 kilometres.

However, the other ridge heads south from the Futa pass along a constant descent to the river Sieve at 233 metres above sea level.

This considerable difference in altitude between the two itineraries convinced us to choose the latter without a second thought. When coming from the north, at the Futa pass it was natural to continue straight on towards the south, entering the Mugello valley along a route that descended continuously, leaving the Apennine peaks behind for good. This avoided a 432-metre difference in level and lengthening the journey some 11 kilometres at a high altitude.

CHAPTER XVII

MOUNT POGGIONE - S. LUCIA (archaeological zone “G”)

- 1 - The start of the search south of the Futa pass.
- 2 - The remains of the paved road (sites G/1, G/2, G/3, G/4 and G/5).
- 3 - The unusual and sudden slope between mount Poggione and S. Lucia.

1 - The start of the search south of the Futa pass

We started our explorations about one kilometre south of the Futa pass, following the top of the ridge from Apparita (on trunk road 65) southwest towards the mountain called “Il Poggione”, which descends to the village of S. Lucia, where it re-joins trunk road 65.

There is a road in Apparita that heads southwest. The first part of the road is gravelled; it then becomes a dirt track, which ends after about one kilometre near the peak of Poggione, at an altitude of 857, after crossing the upper northeast slopes of a hill (901 metres) called “I Trogoli”. At the southeast foot of the hill, Monte di Fò lies at an altitude of 764 metres, on trunk road 65.

When travelling along this dirt track on the ridge, one has the sensation that it belongs to an ancient itinerary. However, its present state, width and surface condition gives the impression that it is a modern dirt road simply offering access to the woods. It is then followed by a footpath indicated by the C.A.I. (Italian Alpine Club).

There was no trace of an ancient route; our only reassurance was the direction of the ridge. We also consulted military cartography (I.G.M. sheet 98 of the map of Italy: Barberino di Mugello) which showed the existence of a mule track. It was possible to acknowledge

that the first stretch coincided with the dirt road, which had evidently been widened and smoothed out in modern times, but the second was impossible to trace due to the impenetrable vegetation covering the area. Nevertheless, we made a number of fruitless explorations. We were disappointed but not disappointed enough to give up, because we were convinced that this was the only ridge in the Mugello valley the Roman road could have continued along. It was only here, in this still uninhabited place covered with dense vegetation that we could hope to find the remains of the paving. We would certainly not have had any better chance further south, where in S. Lucia (altitude: 700), the present day trunk road 65 follows the top of the descending ridge as far as the river Sieve. In those rare cases where the route of the trunk road avoids the small hillocks on the ridge, there are fenced and inaccessible farmhouses.

Therefore, we persevered with our capillary explorations in the area between Apparita and S. Lucia, primarily to trace the mule track. We also referred to the research by Giovanni Uggeri¹ who attempted to identify the route of Flaminus’ road in Tuscany and who had the following to say about the route through the pass: *“north of S. Lucia (altitude: 902) the route of the ancient road can be identified in the straight mule track that remains to the west of the trunk road; it is still used as a municipal boundary and this is indication of the antiquity of the track”*.

¹ G. Uggeri: “La via Flaminia “minor” in Etruria” from: “Studi di antichità in onore di Guglielmo Maetzke”. Published by G. Bretschneider, 1984, page 591.

Giovanni Uggeri is now Professor of Ancient Topography at the Faculty of Literature of “La Sapienza” University in Rome.



The village of S. Lucia (left) and the profile of the ridge that rises steeply to Poggione and “I Trogoli”, photographed from the southeast; the buildings of Monte di Fò are just below the ridge, on the right.

His intuition was later confirmed by the Roman paving found exactly in the area he described.

2 - The remains of the paved road (sites G/1 - G/2 - G/3 - G/4 and G/5:

SITE G/1

Finally, one Sunday in February 1994, our friends, Emanuele Stefanini, Andrea Vignoli and Luigi Vannini, all members of the Bruscoli Archaeological Group, while walking along a footpath that descends from Poggione to S. Lucia, noticed two narrow sandstone blocks lying next to each other which emerged from the soil and interfered with the path (they had probably emerged due to the leaching of the surrounding soil).

Their attentiveness was rewarded because the two stones were the tip of the Roman road edge, later unearthed over its entire 2.40 metre width.

As soon as we heard the news, we immediately went to look at the find, noting that the dimensions and construction technique were the same as the paving

found north of the Futa pass. Just one metre of paving had been unearthed, but it was more than enough to confirm the continuation of the Roman road south of the Futa pass.

We did not wait for the onset of spring to continue the excavation. Fortunately, the sedimentation that covered the first metres of paving was not very deep: on one side, it measured about 30 cm and on the other 50-60 cm. However, numerous beech trees had grown above the road and their roots hindered our progress a great deal. Some had penetrated between one stone and another and were difficult to uproot. When we came across tree stumps it took us hours and hours to cut through them by hand (we could not use a power saw because the small stones incorporated in the wood damaged the blade).

In the spring, we uncovered about 7-8 metres over the entire usual 2.40 metre width. We hoped we would be able to count on the collaboration of a number of friends during the summer months. We also promptly informed Fedeli from the Archaeological Superintendency about our new find. In March, he carried out an initial inspection.

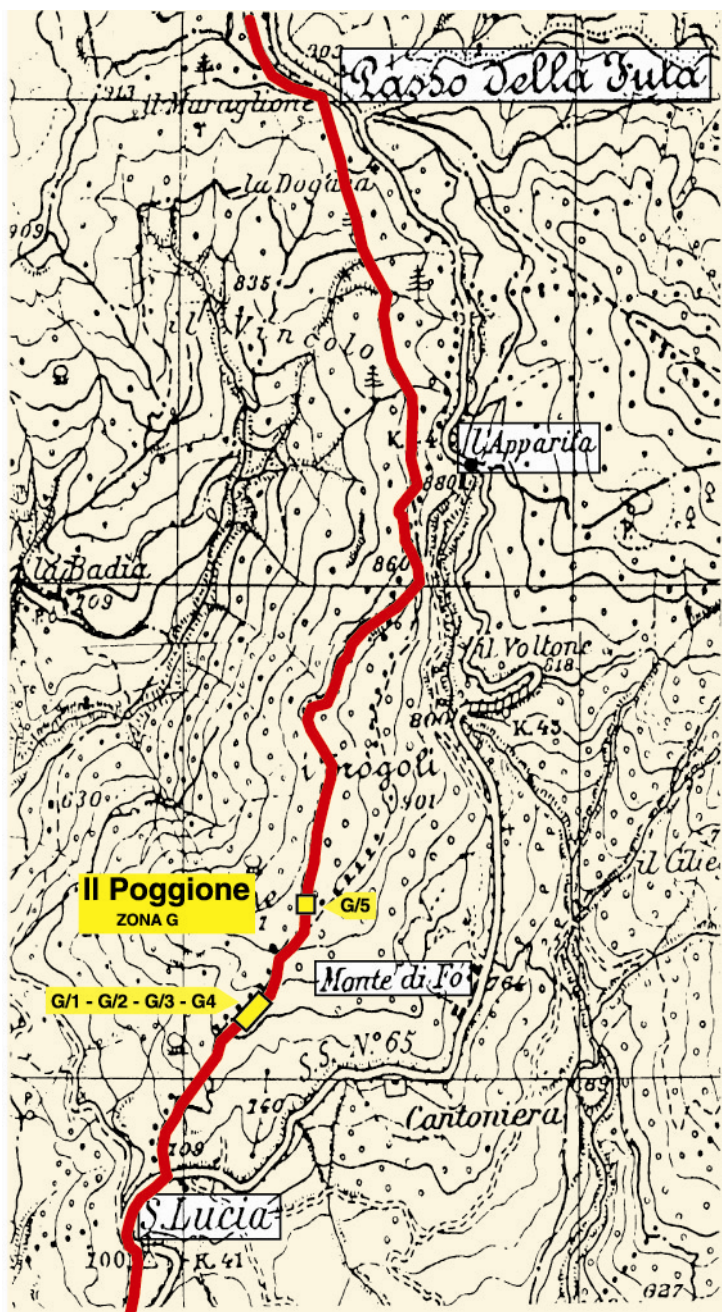


Plate 29

- Archaeological site G: finds on mount Poggione (in Monte di Fò)
- Sites G/1 - G/2 - G/3 - G/4 and G/5: stretches of paved road.
- The route of the Roman road.

(Italian Military Geographic Institution (I.G.M.) authorisation No. 5034 dated 13.07.99)

Mount Poggione (site G/1 - March 1994): from left:
L. Fedeli, Emanuele Stefanini and Andrea Vignoli at
the first find south of the Futa pass, formulating
theories about the probable route of the road hidden
below the wood.



Mount Poggione (site G/1 – February 1994): the first
metre of paved road unearthed south of the Futa pass.
Note how the thick undergrowth of thorny bushes and
plants prevent access.





Mount Poggione (archaeological zone “G” - March 1994): *Franco Santi and Emanuele Stefanini hack their way through the mass of thorny plants on the ground with a great deal of effort to uncover the road.*



Mount Poggione (site G/1 – August 1994): *a beech stump that has grown on the road doggedly resists the efforts of our three friends attempting to remove it: Fioravante Montanari (bending over), Corrado Peli and Luciano Grassi.*

In 1994, excavation continued and by the end of the summer, we had uncovered sixteen metres of perfectly preserved road. The road had compact edges and the stones lay at their original level. The width², straightness and structure was identical to the numerous stretches of paving already found north of the Futa pass and confirmed that this belonged to the same road system.

The excellent state of preservation and the perfect adherence of the edge stones demonstrated the exceptional care taken to lay the road; even today, it is not possible to insert a knife blade between one stone and another. Even the capillary roots of the trees encountered an obstacle impossible to overcome along these edges; they either developed beyond the carriageway or grew horizontally over the surface of the paving, only penetrating in the centre where the stones adhere less. However, two tree stumps remained in the centre of the road, which we were not able to remove completely. Other tree stumps did not grow on top of the road but had partially spread as far as the edge. We were not able to uproot these trees completely and because they partially covered the edge of the road, they created the impression that the road was not perfectly straight.

² This stretch of paving has a constant 2.40 metre width (corresponding exactly to 8 Roman feet); the average width of the other stretches of road ranges from 2.40 to 2.50 metres. This difference can very probably be attributed to the different state of preservation of the structure: the 2.40-metre wide stretch is as perfectly compact as when it was built, whereas the stones in the 2.50-metre wide stretches may have become loose due to soil subsidence. This theory is confirmed by the stretch of paving found at the foot of Poggio Castelluccio (chapter XII, site D/3), where, near the usual 2.40 metre width, the carriageway widens to as much as 2.80 metres, caused by the subsidence of the ground on which the road structure was laid.



Mount Poggiaccio (site G/1): numerous beech trees had grown above the soil covering the paving. Their roots had penetrated between the stones, greatly hindering excavation and making our task considerably more demanding.



Mount Poggione (site G/1 – August 1994): excavation continues with the help of our friends, Emanuele Stefanini, Franco Bacci and Luciano Grassi under the supervision of Franco Santi, sitting while he takes a break.



Mount Poggione (site G/1 – 3 September 1999): Giancarlo Susini from the University of Bologna observes the Roman road stone by stone.



Mount Poggione (site G/1): the 16-metre stretch of road paving after excavation. The right edge remains partially covered by stubborn tree stumps and gives the incorrect impression that it is not perfectly straight. Two beech stumps remain on the carriageway. (Photograph by V. Cavara).

SITE G/2

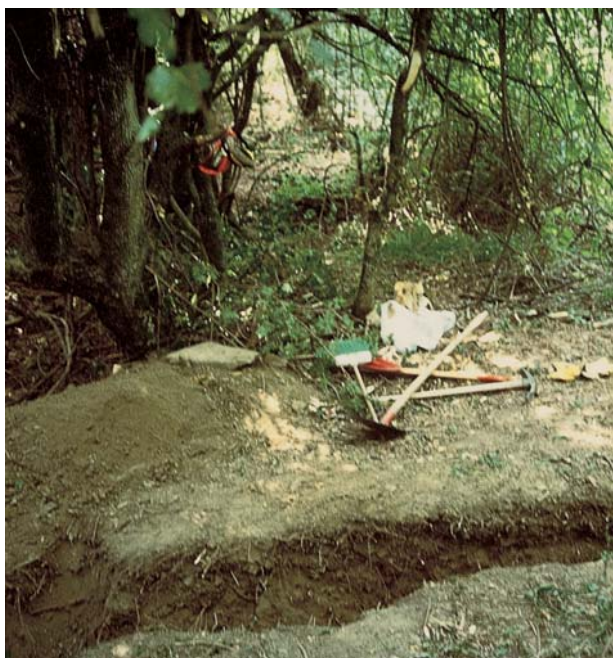
Along the stretch uncovered previously, the gradient of the road is modest and the morphology of the terrain towards the north continues along a slight slope for at least 60-70 metres.

Thanks to the almost flat nature of the ground, we hoped to find equally well-preserved stretches of paving, having noted during our previous experiences that the best-preserved stretches were on flat or softly sloping ground.

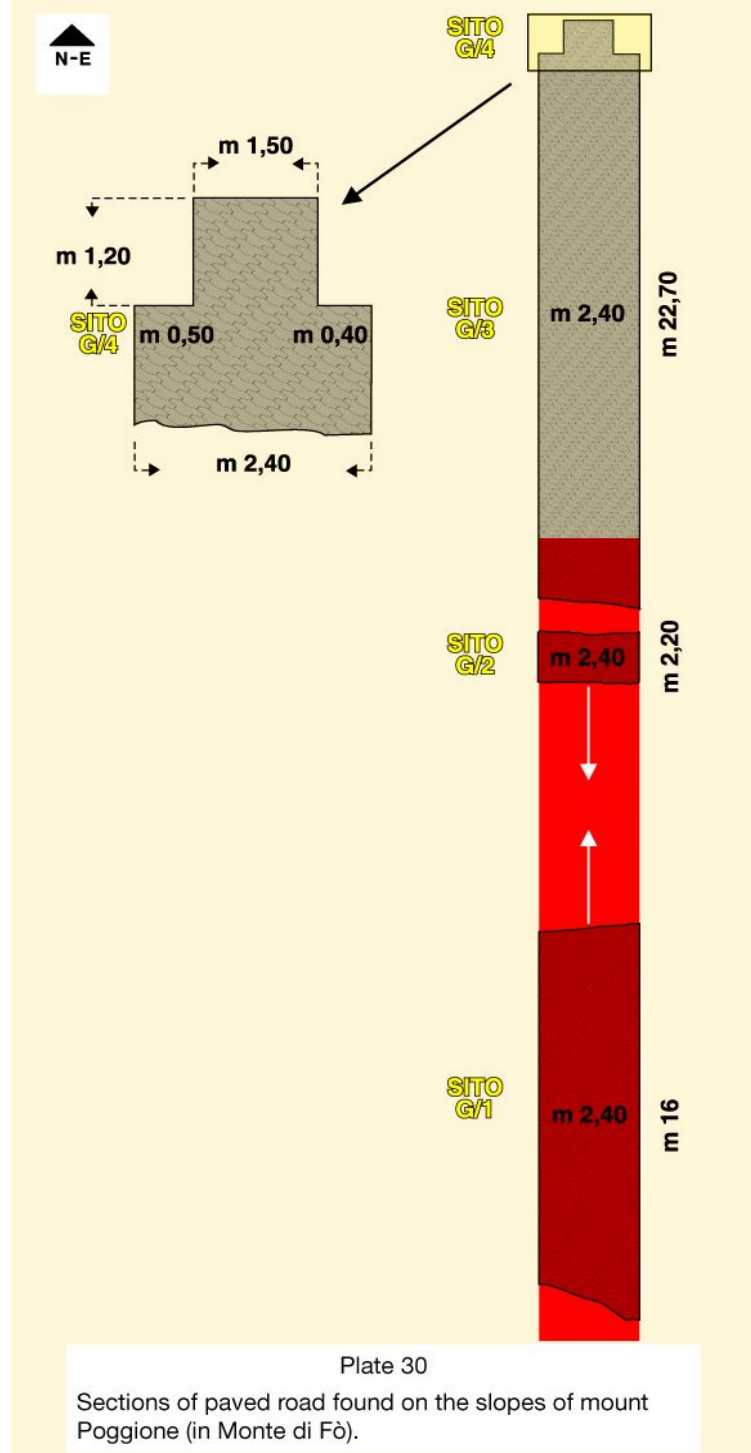
This depended on two obvious natural factors:

- in steeply sloping areas, rainwater does not allow any protective humus to deposit, and it disturbs the paving by firstly eroding its edges and then the soil below.
- on flat ground, the paving is not disturbed by these factors; the opposite occurs and the sedimentation creates a protective layer.

In the summer of 1995, with the help of a number of friends, we identified the area of the wood that probably obscured the continuation of the paving we had uncovered the year before. Here the vegetation had grown with particular vigour to the extent that it had become impenetrable due to thorn bushes and every type of scrub tangled with old man's beard. We managed to open a passage along the straight line indicated



Mount Poggione (site G/2): the narrow trench dug in the thick wood, perpendicular to the direction of the road, in an attempt to intercept the road below the considerable layer of earth.



by the carriageway we had already unearthed (this took much time and effort). We then made some 20 metres of headway as far as where we wanted to carry out our test excavation.

Before we started the excavation, we checked that we were aligned with the straight line of the already unearthed road using two pieces of twine. Then, with the help of a number of friends³, we started to excavate at a right angle to

³ We would particularly like to thank the people listed below for their help during this excavation: Franco Bacci, Alberto Bargiotti, Gianguido Giovannini (Ghigo), Luciano Grassi, Antonella and Giampaolo Marchini, Fioravante Montanari, Corrado Peli, Giampietro and Alessandra Pizzo and Giancarlo Rivelli.

the route of the road, digging a 35-40 cm trench, wide enough for a pick and shovel.

At a depth of 70-80 cm, we had still not found anything, whereas during our previous experiences the paving had been at a maximum depth of 60-70 cm.

The group of “diggers” began to feel discouraged and someone suggested interrupting the excavation and retrying further north. After a brief discussion, we agreed to continue digging to a depth of 120 cm.

Our perseverance was rewarded; at the depth of one metre, the pick hit a stone; next to this lay another stone and then yet another. In just a short time, the ground covering the bottom of the narrow trench was removed and the paving appeared over its entire 2.40 metre width.

Having achieved our objective we eagerly ate our well-deserved packed lunch.

Mount Poggione (site G/2): *the paving appears at the bottom of the narrow trench, at a depth of one metre.*



Mount Poggione (site G/2): *after locating the paving at a depth of one metre, work to enlarge the excavation continued happily beneath the luxuriant vegetation. In the photograph are Giancarlo Rivelli (with his back to the camera), Corrado Peli, Antonella Marchini, Cesare Agostini and Franco Bacci.*



Mount Poggione (site G/2): the dark green, vigorous and wild vegetation seems to want to protect from the rays of the sun the re-awakening of this road: a testimony of ancient splendour.



Mount Poggione (site G/2): at the end of the excavation, when the road surface had dried, the light grey sandstone blocks illuminated the site, giving the sensation of a pleasant reawakening after centuries and centuries of forced hibernation below one metre of soil.

The next day, we enlarged the excavation over a length of 2.20 metres and removed the one metre layer of sedimentation. The paving below was perfectly preserved, its edge stones still aligned as they were when the road was built.

When the road surface dried, the light coloured sandstone blocks illuminated the excavation area, giving the sensation of a magic reawakening after centuries of hibernation. Its geometric shape resembled a painting framed by the surrounding brown earth, sculpted by the clean cut of the excavation. All around, the dark green vegetation, pierced by scant sunlight, seemed to want to protect from indiscreet eyes the reawakening of a work that was a reminder of ancient splendour.

These sensations inspired us not to enlarge any further the excavation, so that others could enjoy the emotion of seeing the unexpected and sudden vision of the Roman paving in the dense woodland for themselves.

SITE G/3

After the finds in sites G/1 and G/2, we were satisfied with the results we had achieved; therefore, we suspended the search in this area, as we were also advised to do by the Superintendency. Sometimes, to safeguard archaeological finds it is better to leave them buried below the soil and on occasion, remains can even be re-buried (as with the kiln on Piana degli Ossi). We also wanted to save the trees from being cut down. The proof provided by the presence of the unearthed road was more than enough to prove that it continued into the Mugello valley.

In the following spring (1996), during the usual annual trip to clean away the fallen leaves from the unearthed stretches of paving, we noticed that during the autumn and winter, the trees had been cut down in this area. Without the trees the area appeared desolate but

the clearing that had been created revealed the gradient of the downhill slope.

We immediately noticed that along the route of our latest excavation (site G/2), the almost flat ground continued for about 25-30 metres north, and then the faint traces of the ancient mule track started to climb steeply upwards; it was easy to perceive that the paving continued below these few metres because the ground level was the same as the soil that buried the already unearthed stretch.

We soon wanted to carry out another excavation now that the moral obstacle of having to safeguard the trees no longer existed since they had been cut down.

In May 1996, we carried out a test excavation 24 metres north of site G/2. We found the paving below 70-80 cm of soil on the same axis as the previously discovered stretch; as always, it was magnificently preserved.

This discovery stirred us to attempt to unearth the entire stretch of paving in between. The idea was appealing but involved exceptional effort considering the great amount of very compact soil that needed to be removed (about 35-40 cubic metres) ⁴.

At the start of August 1996, having convinced a number of hesitant friends who were worried about the toil involved, we started to dig from the test excavation site, with the intention of continuing as far as site G/2 only if the gradually uncovered paving was perfectly preserved. If this was not the case, we were to suspend the work.

As the excavation advanced, the paving we uncovered was always perfect; the stones on the edges were aligned with the straight line of the carriageway without the minimum deviation to the side; even the blocks on the downhill edge, more exposed to soil subsidence, had not moved from their original position.

Once we had removed the soil above, it was a real pleasure for us to clean the paving stones, removing with caution the last veil of earth that covered them and



Mount Poggione (site G/3 – August 1996): a colourful team of voluntary diggers busy unearthing the road. It is possible to recognise from the left: Corrado Peli, Giampaolo Marchini, Giampietro Pizzo (with his back to the camera), Giangiacomo Giovannini (bending over), Francesco Cappelli and Alessandra Pizzo.

which had also seeped into the joins on the surface.

When we had finished, it was possible to admire the compactness of the paving, formed by a mosaic of stones skilfully laid so they fitted closely against each other, and still perfectly level.

⁴ Consider that one cubic metre of compact earth weighs some 20 tons; this meant excavating with a pick and moving with a shovel about 700-800 tons of material.



Mount Poggione (site G/3): after the trees had been cut down during the autumn and winter of 1995-96, we decided to continue the excavation. In August 1996, we unearthed the most beautiful stretch of the paving. In this panoramic photograph, it glows in the sunlight framed by the intense green of the wood.



Mount Poggione (site G/3): the light of the sunset illuminates the paving, which looks like a mirage in the boundless green of the woods covering the Apennine range.



Mount Poggione (site G/3): this image highlights the magnitude of the road construction and its perfect straight line, even though it is located in an impervious Apennine mountain pass, at an altitude of 800 metres above sea level.



Mount Poggione (site G/3): an “eye level” view of the Roman paving gives the exact idea of the thickness of the 80 cm layer of ground that covered it (highlighted on the right).

The paving that gradually emerged was so well preserved that no one dared to suggest interrupting the excavation before we had reached the objective we had set ourselves ⁵.

By the end of August, we had uncovered 22 metres of paving. We suspended the excavation about 2 metres from site G/2, to highlight the depth of the sedimentation that had accumulated on top of the road over the centuries. All our strenuous efforts were amply repaid by the gradual appearance of the paved road, which turned out to be the best preserved of all the tracts we uncovered in our twenty year search for the paving.

SITE G/4

In August 1997, we spent a number of days continuing the excavation we had suspended in 1996 northwards to uncover a few further metres of the magnificent paving.

Here we had no doubt regarding what we would find, and this assurance from a certain point of view was negative: we were not fired by curiosity.

At the end of the day, after the last clean up, the paving reserved a great surprise for us: the downhill edge was no longer aligned with the former edge; it was about 40 cm narrower. We also checked the uphill edge and this appeared to be about 50 cm narrower too. In other words, the carriageway suddenly shrank by 90 cm, reduced

⁵ The work team was not always made up of the same people; day by day, we recruited any friends and acquaintances who offered to help. Some, after a long hard day of digging, could not return due to personal commitments; others did not want to repeat the experience, not being used to working with a pick and shovel. Everyone always worked with enthusiasm, including the young boys and girls who were entrusted with less arduous tasks, such as sweeping away the last layer of earth covering the paving. On this excavation we received the most help from friends on holiday in Valserena and Pian di Balestra, whom we would like to thank, along with Carlo Ginepri for his photographic advice.



Mount Poggione (site G/4): *the carriageway suddenly narrows, testifying a later repair after soil subsidence had dragged the paving downhill. The reduced 1.50 m width proves that this rough repair was carried out when the original width of the carriageway was no longer necessary.*

to a width of just 1.50 metres. We continued to excavate for a further 1.20 metres and noted that this narrower stretch of carriageway was obviously a repair carried out after the road had been damaged by a landslide; the stones were positioned with less care and only the downhill edge featured blocks similar to the original stretch. Rather than a deep and extensive landslide, this was probably just modest subsidence of the soil beneath because 15-20 metres further north, the route of the ancient mule track continued straight on uphill.

This observation convinced us to check if there were any remains of the collapsed road just little further on. Therefore, we excavated ten metres further north, along the declivity

below; at a depth of some two metres compared to the height of the road, we found the still aligned stones used to form the downhill edge of the original paving. This proved that the soil subsidence had caused the entire width of the paving to collapse over a length of at least 15-20 m. The narrow part of the carriageway was, therefore, a repair carried out during a later age to restore road use, when a carriageway measuring 1.50 m was sufficient.



Mount Poggione (site G/4): *the edge of the collapsed paving was found at a level about 2 metres below the road surface.*

SITE G/5

The finds described confirmed that the route of the Roman road passed through the southeast slopes of Poggione.

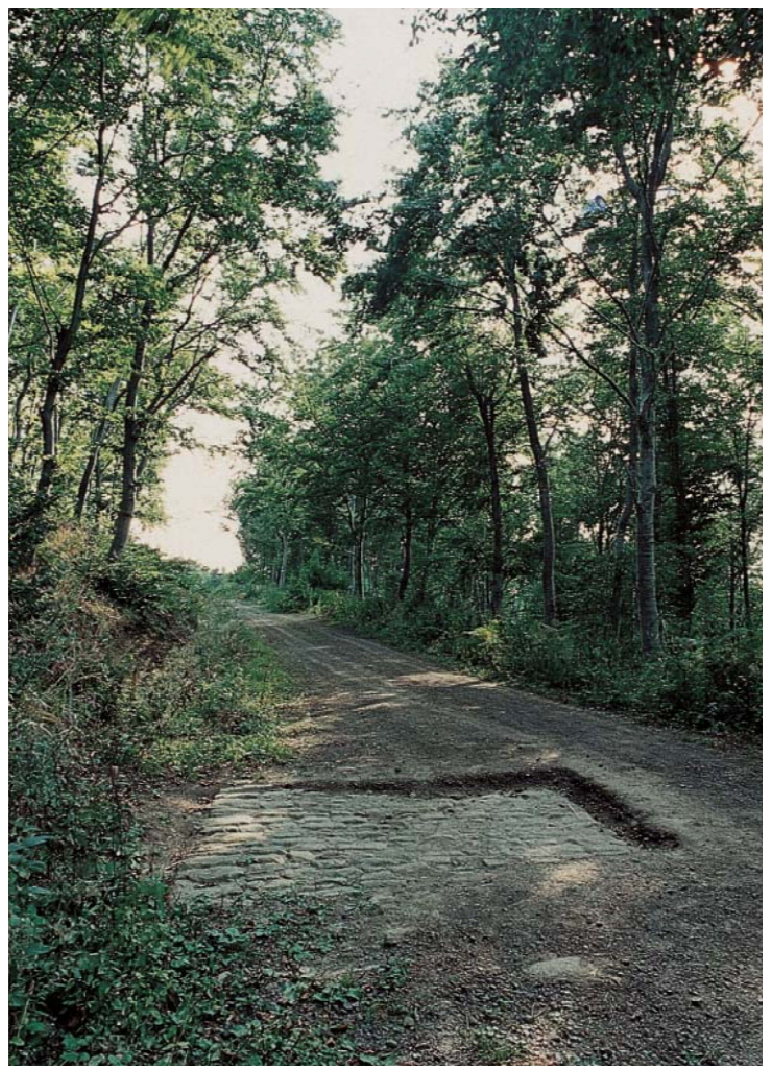
We continued to follow the line of the uncovered paving stones northwards along the mule track, which continued in a straight line along a steep upward slope, its bed more similar to that of a torrent than a road.

A few isolated and well-aligned blocks at its edges were the obvious remains of the paved carriageway. Following these modest clues we eventually joined up with

the wide dirt track we described at the beginning of this chapter (during our first explorations we did not consider the track because of its modern aspect). However, when the finds further south brought us back to this same place, we decided its route deserved a specific archaeological verification.

The track follows the west versant of the ridge along a relatively flat route, a few tens of metres below its summit: characteristics that correspond to a Roman road. However, its road surface it did not give any clue to its being part of an ancient road system. It looked like any of the typical dirt roads opened through the woods in modern times to allow the transit of lorries. The present-day condition of the road gave little hope of finding any stretches of paving because it had obviously been created by widening, digging and flattening the ancient mule track. Therefore, we feared that if any stretches of paving had been saved from the centuries-old use of the mule track, they would probably have been dug up and scattered by the mechanical shovels. Thus with great scepticism we decided to carry out a few test excavations.

One morning in June 1997, while we were carefully examining its edges, we saw the tips of three sandstone blocks, one next to each other, emerging on the uphill side, half covered by the weeds that grow on the hillocks. We removed the vegetation and below about 5-6 cm of earth, we completely uncovered the upper face of the three stones; a few slight knocks with a small pick uncovered about a dozen matched and aligned stones that were unquestionably the edge of a paved road. We were truly surprised and incredulous. It was the road we were looking for, covered by just a few centimetres of soil and gravel. After removing the entire layer of soil and gravel covering it, we ascertained that it was exactly 2.40 metres wide; it was the miraculously intact continuation of the Roman paving, with the same structure and compactness of the road found 400 metres further south.



Mount Poggione (site G/5): the flattening and widening of the ancient mule track carried out about a dozen years earlier to allow access to lorries used to transport wood, has miraculously spared the Roman paving in this point, which has remained hidden below a few centimetres of earth and gravel.

We only uncovered two metres of the road over its entire width, to avoid damage by the transit of tractors and lorries⁶. This was more than enough to definitely confirm that at least some stretches of the Roman paving was hidden below the dirt road.

When we pass through this area, we feel a sense of gratification for that fortunate chance whereby the paving was saved by a few centimetres of soil when the mechanical shovels flattened the ancient mule track.

⁶ We would like to thank Davide Giovannini for his help during this excavation.



The Futa pass: at the start of the 20th century, reaching the Futa pass was such an event for passengers that it deserved a souvenir photo.

3 - The unusual and sudden slope of the ridge between mount Poggione and S. Lucia.

When searching for the road on the south versant of mount Poggione, we noticed that the ridge above S. Lucia featured an unusual and sudden downhill slope compared to the harmonious descent of the ridge towards the river Sieve. It was possible to see a clear break that hinted at a vast and deep landslide. When the road was subsequently discovered on the southeast versant of mount Poggione (archaeological area "G") this event was indirectly confirmed. Following the direction of the road south, we found a few remains for 60-70 metres, proving the road continued in a straight line. Then, where the

ridge drops above S. Lucia, the remains disappeared completely.

We were convinced that the landslide took place after the road was built, dragging it downhill and not just upsetting the road but the entire area around S. Lucia. In fact, if this precipice had existed when the Roman road was built, the straight line of the road would have had to deal with an unnatural and insurmountable difference in level.

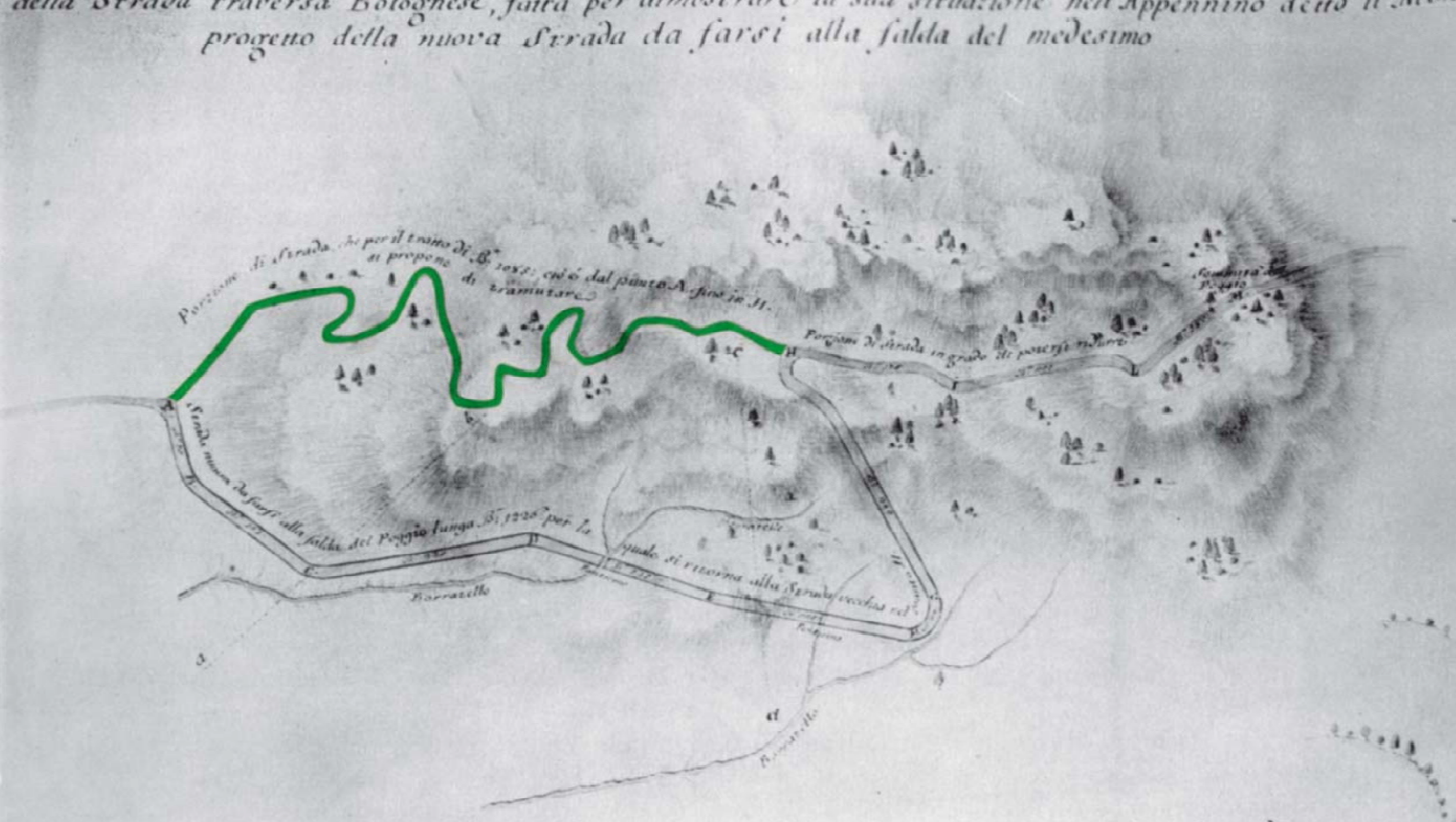
This was improbable, especially considering that just a few metres before the precipice, we found almost flat and perfectly straight stretches of paving.

To avoid the steep precipice, the medieval mule track (created along the same route after the landslide), followed a diversion riddled with hairpin bends as proved by the drawing and the words of the engineer, Anastagi. In 1745, Anastagi was asked by the Grand Duke of Tuscany to draw up a plan for a carriage road from Florence to Bologna through the Futa pass. He mapped out an alternative route in this point (Monte di Fò) to avoid the steep gradient that did not allow the transit of carriages⁷.

Daniele Sterpos also mentions this project⁸: "After Montecarelli (altitude: 522) the typical structures used to build mountain roads increased: supporting walls and rock-fill to create an artificial plane. A very ancient mule track from Barberino passed through Montecarelli; it was once used to reach the Stale pass and to go to Bologna. The new road had no other choice than to follow the route of the mule track as far as the pass. Some stretches of the mule track were widened, flattened and the roadbed was provided with additional support and then linked to entirely new stretches of road. According to Anastagi, the longest diversions were along on the stretch after Montecarelli and

⁷ Francesco, Duke of Lorena and Grand Duke of Tuscany had married the Archduchess, Maria Teresa, daughter of the Emperor of Austria. As of 1745, the Grand Duke of Tuscany often resided at the court of Vienna and felt the need for a practical carriage link across the Apennines, the only existing break in the road system between Florence and Vienna. Study into the construction of a new road to Bologna started in Tuscany in 1745. The general specifications of the road and the route were decided in 1746; the engineer, Anastasio Anastagi was immediately told to define the work actually required to build the road. In January 1749, Anastagi presented a complete and detailed list of the work needed to carry out the general project; the work included the Monte di Fò deviation. The road was opened to traffic in 1762. It was the first time that it was possible to cross the Apennines in a carriage.

⁸ Daniele Sterpos: "Comunicazioni stradali attraverso i tempi: Bologna-Firenze" published by Soc. Autostrade - Istituto geografico De Agostini, 1961, page 134.



Monte Poggione (Monte di Fò): in 1745, Anastagi was asked by the Grand Duke of Tuscany to engineer a carriage road from Florence to Bologna across the Futa pass. He planned a diversion for the ancient mule track in the Monte di Fò area "which tortuously lies on the ridge of the knoll" (Excerpt from "Comunicazioni stradali attraverso i tempi: Bologna-Firenze" by Daniele Sterpos).

to Monte di Fò , where the entire road that "tortuously lies on the ridge of the knoll" was replaced; in fact the tenth section or lot consists in a single "transformation" between Monte di Fò and the pass (omissis). According to the estimate, the new stretches (the tenth and eleventh) from Montecarelli to Traversa, were the most demanding. The list of required work is very long: as well as the road surface (mostly built *ex-novo*); there are thousands of stretches of wall and just as many parapets, very many bridges

large and small, spanning the various "borri" (furrows) that the route encounters along the left of the mountain".

This description of the scheduled work demonstrates the construction difficulties required to overcome the last 2 or 3 kilometres before the Futa pass.

Therefore, it is more than a guess that the early abandonment of the Roman road was also due to the interruptions caused by the large scale and destructive landslides that took place along its route.